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## THE STELE OF TEIMA IN ARABIA

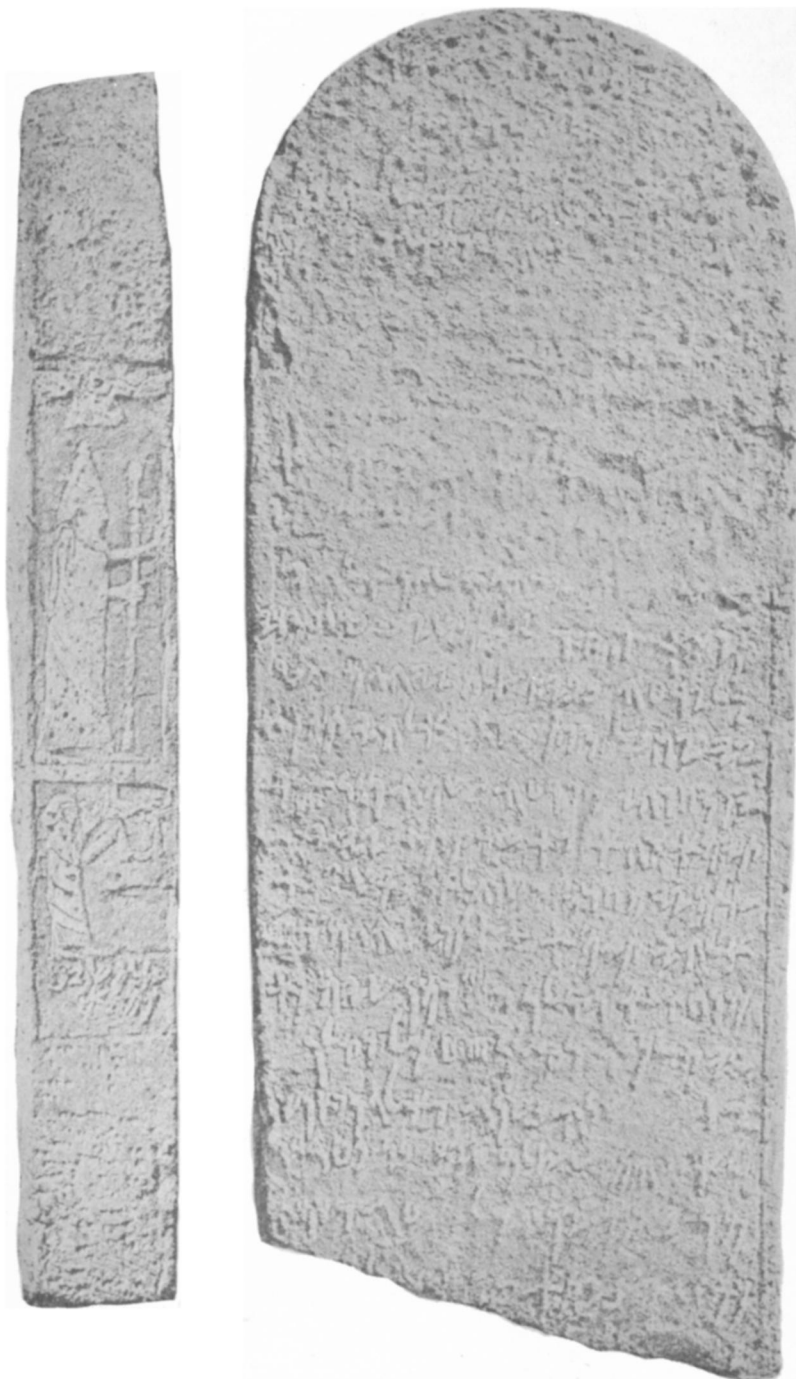
### A WELCOME OF THE GODS

SOUTHERN Arabia, the country of the Sabæans and Minæans, and of the fabulous Queen of Sheba, has yielded hundreds of inscriptions written in an alphabet, which, although at first appearance it does not very closely resemble Phœnician script, was nevertheless derived from it, and cannot therefore be much older than about 1000 B. C. These inscriptions furnish us a considerable amount of information concerning the history, the religion, and the life of the ancient South-Arabians. But Northern Arabia seemed for a long time shrouded in a cloud of darkness, before a sudden light was thrown upon it, by the advent of Islam, that shone up brightly like a flash of lightning.

A country situated between the two great centers of civilisation, Egypt on one side and Babylonia on the other, could not have remained without influence from either side; but until the last quarter of the past century very little was known about pagan Northern Arabia, except what was gleaned from a few passages in the Old Testament and in Greek authors.

Within a decade, i. e., between 1875 and 1885, the country was visited by three dauntless explorers, Charles Doughty, an Englishman, Charles Huber, an Alsatian in French service, and Prof. Julius Euting, at present Director of the Imperial Library at Strassburg. A large number of inscriptions in Aramaic, Nabatæan, and so-called Proto-Arabic characters were brought to light by these men, and the deciphering of these documents has greatly increased our knowledge of these regions in ancient times. Among these in-

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scriptions the one on the stele of Teima belongs to the oldest monuments of Northern Arabia and is rightly regarded as the most important.

The city of Teima, located in Northern Arabia, about half way between Mecca and Damascus, has been known since the times of Isaiah for its abundant water supply and its palm groves, bearing the finest dates. As it was situated on the ancient commercial road from Southern Arabia to Egypt and to Syria, it was but natural that here a wealthy emporium grew up.<sup>1</sup> Even at the present time the place is famous for its enormous spring which keeps sixty water-wheels constantly busy, and for its luxurious date crops. Soil is appraised to-day according to the number of palm-trees in exactly the same way as in olden times, described in the inscription of our stele—another proof of the stability of the East. A striking parallel to this custom is found, e. g., in other oases, viz., in the Sahara, where a man's wealth is judged by the number of palm-trees which he owns, and the amount of water to which he is entitled.

All of the above-named three travellers visited Teima. M. Huber went there twice, once alone in 1880, and a second time in the company of Professor Euting in 1884. During his first visit he saw the inscription which afterward was to become so famous, and copied a few lines of it.

No sooner had Professor Euting seen the stone himself than he recognised that this was a monument of extraordinary importance. Copies and squeezes were taken and sent to Germany, and the stone itself was purchased.

The inscription was published by Professor Noeldeke in the Proceedings of the Berlin Academy in 1884, and after the unfortunate death of M. Huber at the hands of his treacherous Arab guides, the stone was secured for the Louvre by Dr. Lostalot, at that time French Consul in Djeddah, Arabia.

The stele is a slab of lime-stone, 110 centimetres high, 43 centimetres wide, and 12 centimetres thick, or, in Assyrian measures,

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xxi. 14. Job vi. 19.

2 cubits high, 4 hands wide, and 1 hand thick. The front bears the inscription in raised characters. On the left end we find bas-reliefs and two copies of one very short inscription.

The bas-reliefs may be described as follows :

Beginning at the top we see first a winged disk, a very common symbol of the sun-god in Egyptian art. This symbol was borrowed by the Assyrians, and from them it seems to have passed to the inhabitants of Teima, for here it is executed according to the Assyrian fashion.

Directly under the disk there is the figure of a god, who is represented as a bearded man clothed in Assyrian fashion and wearing a mitre like that of the Assyrian kings. In his left hand he has a staff or a spear, while with his right hand he seems to indicate that he grants protection to, and accepts the offerings of, a priest whose picture is carved underneath his own and is represented on a smaller scale, as is customary where divine and mortal persons are pictured side by side. He is likewise clothed in an Assyrian toga, his head is uncovered, and with his hands he performs the offering on the altar before him. On the top of the altar, and underneath, the name of the priest is given: "Salm-shezeb, the priest."<sup>1</sup>

The inscription itself is much mutilated at the beginning, but thanks to the sagacious comments of a number of French and German scholars the sense of the whole is now well understood, and even the missing parts can be restored to some extent with reasonable certainty.

The document may be entitled "A Welcome of the Gods," for in it we read that the gods of Teima agree to receive in their midst a newcomer, the god Salm of Hagam, who was brought to Teima by Salmshezeb, son of Petosiri, furthermore to sanction this man and his descendants as the new god's priests, and finally to endow the new temple with an annual income.

The name Petosiri, "devoted to Osiris," shows us that the donor of the temple was of Egyptian origin; his son Salmshezeb,

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<sup>1</sup> צלמשזב כמרא.

i. e. in Aramaic "Salm has preserved," had probably adopted a new name, perhaps chosen because he wanted to express his gratitude to the god Salm of Hagam for having preserved him from some danger. Then Salmshezeb may, possibly in fulfilment of a vow, have built a temple for Salm of Hagam in Teima, for which the gods and the king of Teima gave the assurance: first to recognise him and his descendants as the priests in the newly built temple, and secondly, to grant the temple a certain income from the sacred (or public) palm grove (field) and from the king's estate.

The editors of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*<sup>1</sup> have correctly divided the inscription into three parts.

1. Lines 1-8: must have contained the reasons why the gods and the king of Teima recognised Salmshezeb as priest and endowed the temple of Salm of Hagam.

2. Lines 8-15: speak of the erection of the monument and enumerate the rights of the priest; further, those who should destroy it are cursed.

3. Lines 15-20: specify the endowment.<sup>1</sup>

4. Lines 20-23: contain Salmshezeb's invocation for his own protection and for that of his descendants.

The following are the text and an English translation of this inscription:

1	[כירה] בשת יג ולמלא
2	[צדקו בתימא צלם זי מחרם ושנגלא]
3	וואשירא אלהי תימא לצלם זי
4	והגם להן שמה ביומא זן [בתימא]
5	[צלמשזב בר פטסרי] זי
6	.....
7	.....
8	זי א להן והא סותא זא
9	זי [הק] צלמשזב בר פטסרי
10	[בכית צלם זי הגם להן אלהי]
11	תימא צדקו לצלמשזב בר פטסרי
12	ולזרעה בכית צלם זי והגם וגבר
13	זי יחבל סותא זא אלהי תימא
14	ינסחורי וזרעה ושמה מן אנשי

<sup>1</sup> Part II, No. 113. The present article is mostly based on this edition.

15 תימא והא זא צרקתא זי ינהבו  
 16 צלם זי מחרם ושנגלא ואשירא  
 17 אלהי תימא לצלם זי הגם און  
 18 מן הקלא רקלן 16 ומן שימתא  
 19 זי מלכא רקלן 5 כל רקלן  
 20 21 (הא) שנה בשנה ואלהן ואנש  
 21 לא יהנפקן צלמשזכ בר פטסירי  
 22 מן ביתא זנה ולזרעה ושמה  
 23 כמוריא בכוריא זנה (לעלם)

- 1 [In the month...] of the 22d year [of the king....]  
 2 [in Teim]a, Salm [of Mahram and Shangala]  
 3 [and Ash]îra, the gods of Teima, [sanctioned] Salm of  
 4 [Hagam]. Therefore he was introduced on this day [in Tei]ma  
 5 [by Salmshezeb, son of Petosiri]..... who  
 6 .....  
 7 .....  
 8 .....This is therefore [the stele]  
 9 which Salmhezeb, son of Petosiri, [set] up  
 10 [in the temple of S]alm of Hagam. For the  
 11 gods of Teima [sanction]ed Salmshezeb, son of Petosiri,  
 12 and his seed in the temple of Salm of Hagam. And any man  
 13 who shall destroy this stele, may the gods of Teima  
 14 pluck out him, and his seed, and his posterity from before  
 15 Teima! And this is the grant which  
 16 Salm of Mahram and Shangala and Ashîra,  
 17 the gods of Teima, have [given] to Salm of Hagam, na[mely]:  
 18 from the field 16 palms, and from the treasure  
 19 of the king 5 palms, in all  
 20 21 palms year by year. And neither gods nor men  
 21 shall bring [out] Salmshezeb, son of Petosiri,  
 22 from this temple, neither his [see]d nor his posterity, [who are]  
 23 prie[sts in] this temple [forever]!

Scarcely anything is known concerning the gods mentioned in this inscription. It has been suggested that Shangala is the same as the Babylonian goddess Shagal or the moon-god Sin-gala, and that Ashîra is contained in the Palmyrene name Rabasira,<sup>1</sup> or that Ashîra is identical with the goddess Ashêra, known from the Old Testament. In Salm of Mahram and Salm of Hagam we must see

<sup>1</sup> רבאסירא *Ῥαβασείρα*.

local gods whose cult spread beyond their original place of worship; parallels from the Semitic as well as the Greek and Roman religions are known, for instance: Ilat of Salkhad (in the Hauran) אלמקה ד הרן in Southern Arabia, Jupiter Olympius, Venus Paphia, etc. A place called al-Hagm is found in Southern Arabia, and Mahrama in Northern Arabia. Moreover, Mahram has been compared with the Abyssinian war-god Mahrem, who is mentioned in the ancient inscriptions of Axum and corresponds to the Greek Ares.

The date of this inscription may approximately be fixed by a comparison of its script and of its language with those of other Aramaic inscriptions. We are led to conclude that it is not older than the sixth nor younger than the fifth century B. C.

The importance of this document lies in the fact that we learn from it:

1. A well established civilisation with temples, hereditary priesthood, and other public institutions existed in Northern Arabia as early as about 500 B. C.

2. This civilisation was influenced from Egypt, Syria, and Assyria: Egypt is represented by the priest himself, Syria by the Aramaic script and language, Assyria by the sculptures on the left side of the stele.

3. A fact established on other evidence is here corroborated. We see how closely all the countries and communities of the ancient East were interconnected in their history.

Modern scholarship is fully justified when it recognises the conclusion as true, that the Hebrew nation, too, cannot have developed in isolation, and that Israel's political history must have been strongly influenced by the civilisation of the surrounding countries, particularly of the great empires of the ancient East, Babylonia, Assyria, and Egypt.

ENNO LITTMANN.

PRINCETON, N. J.